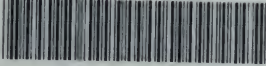
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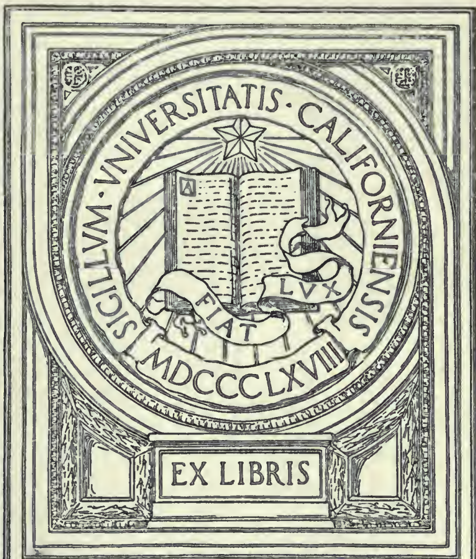
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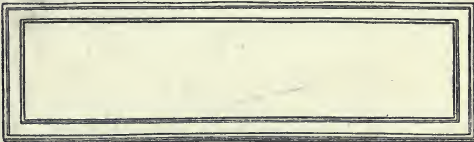

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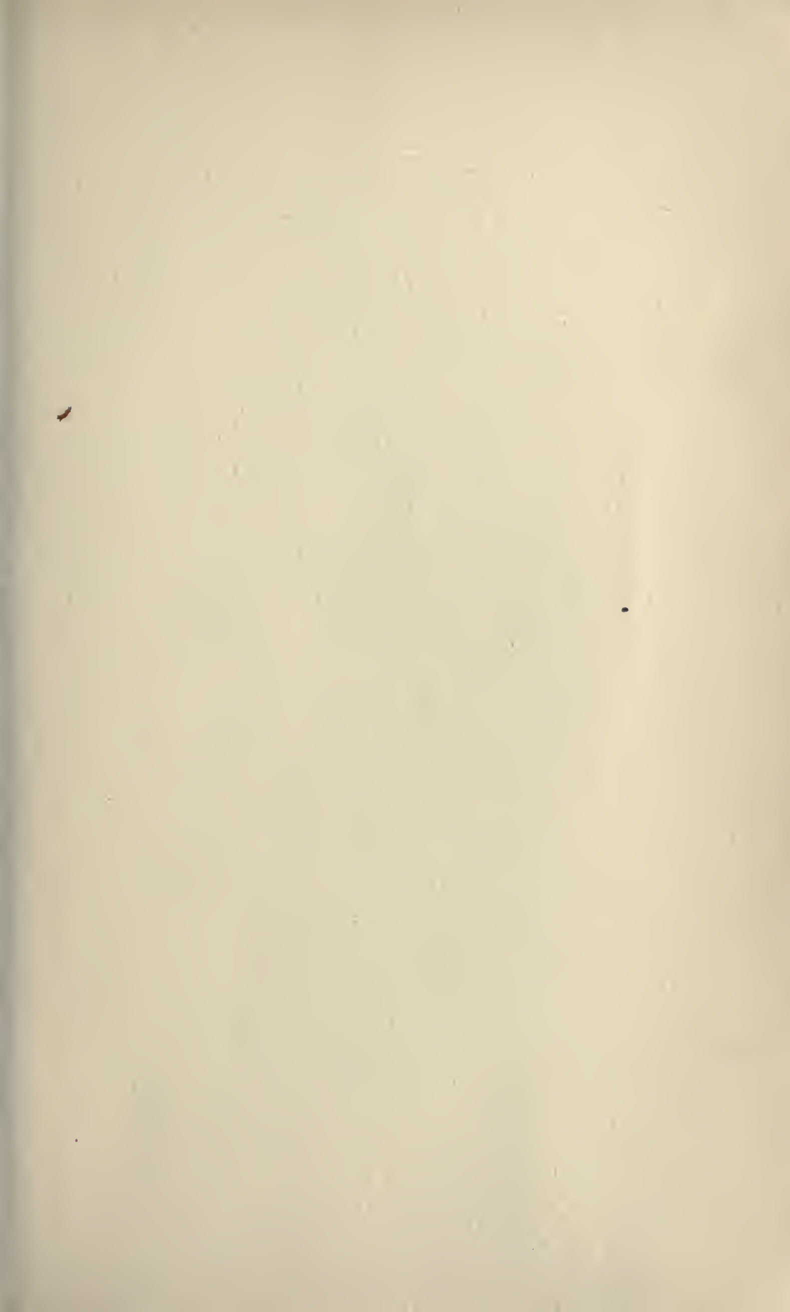

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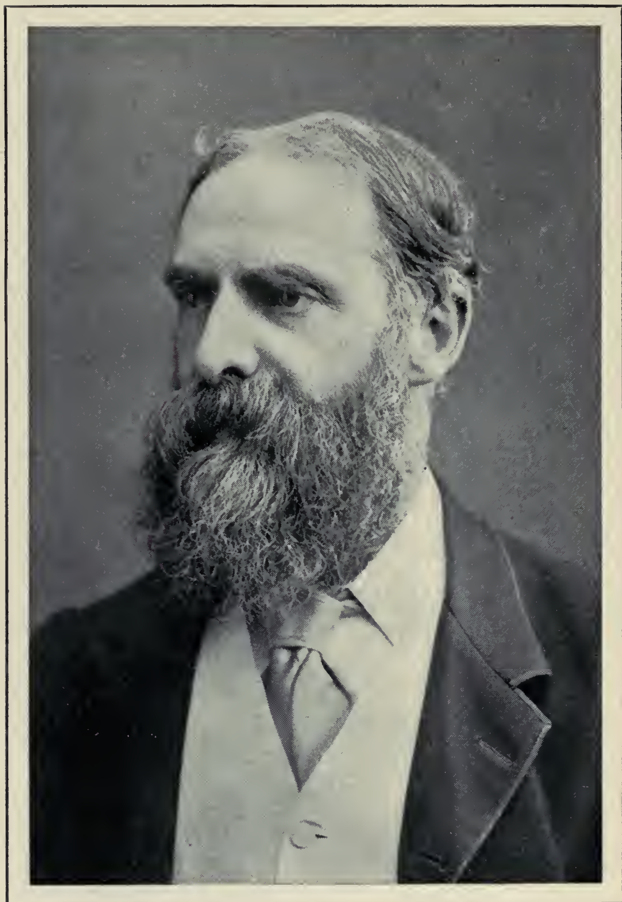


Right Hon. James Bryce, M. P.

Companion Classics.

Recollections of Gladstone,

BY THE

Right Hon. James Bryce,

WITH

Suggestions on Reading.

REPRINT FROM THE YOUTH'S COMPANION.

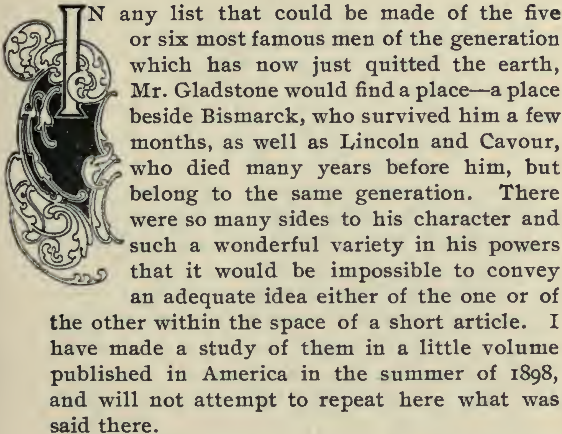
Boston:
Perry Mason Company.

THE impression which a great man makes upon his contemporaries—how he looked, walked, taught, thought and did his work—will always have a freshness of interest and an historical value beyond any impressions gathered or recorded by those who come after him.

The pages which follow present one of the very greatest of men as he appeared to a personal friend and fellow worker, the Right Honorable James Bryce, M. P., a writer singularly qualified by temperament, training and opportunity to set forth the personality of "The Grand Old Man."

It seems fitting that this happy union of a great subject and a distinguished author should be preserved in convenient and durable form; and that to it should be added Mr. Bryce's views on a matter which filled a great place in Gladstone's life as well as in his own.

Recollections of Gladstone.



IN any list that could be made of the five or six most famous men of the generation which has now just quitted the earth, Mr. Gladstone would find a place—a place beside Bismarck, who survived him a few months, as well as Lincoln and Cavour, who died many years before him, but belong to the same generation. There were so many sides to his character and such a wonderful variety in his powers that it would be impossible to convey an adequate idea either of the one or of the other within the space of a short article. I have made a study of them in a little volume published in America in the summer of 1898, and will not attempt to repeat here what was said there.

All that I desire to do in the few paragraphs of this article is to note certain aspects of his character which may be of special interest to young men who desire, at the time when they are forming their own habits of thought and life, to know what were the salient traits and mental qualities of those illustrious ones whose names filled and occupied the world when they were entering it.

What most struck the person who spent a few days in the same house with Mr. Gladstone was the restless and unceasing activity of his mind. People often talked of his industry; but industry rather suggests the steady and dogged application

which plods through a task because the task is set and has got to be despatched. He seemed to work because he liked it, or perhaps rather because he could not help working. His energy was inexhaustible, and when he was not engaged on whatever might for the time being be deemed business, he was just as strenuously occupied in studying or writing about some subject, quite unconnected with his regular employment, which for the moment interested him.

His Varied Interests.

Nearly everything, except perhaps natural science, of which he was strangely ignorant, did interest him. Theology and ecclesiastical history had the foremost place, but general history, classical archæology, poetry — especially the Greek and Italian poets — were always in his mind, and books about them might always be seen on his table. The abundance of his interests and the zest with which he indulged them were a great help to him, for they enabled him to throw off the cares of politics, and they distracted his thoughts from the inevitable vexations and disappointments of public life. It was his practice when he returned late at night from the House of Commons after an exciting debate to place a light at the head of his bed and read some agreeable but not too exciting book, often, but not always, a novel, for twenty minutes, after which he scarcely ever failed to have a good night's rest.

Sometimes he felt the activity of his mind press too hard on him. I remember one misty evening, between ten and eleven o'clock, to have seen his remarkable figure a few yards before

me in St. James's Park. There was no mistaking him, even at night, for his walk was peculiar, indeed, so peculiar that people who did not know him would turn to watch him as he passed along the street. Thinking it hardly safe for him, well known as he was, to be alone in so solitary a place, I overtook him and asked if I might walk by him, apologizing if I should be disturbing his thoughts.

"My wish," he answered, with a touch of sadness, "and my difficulty is to avoid thinking, so I am glad to be disturbed." And a year or two later he told me that to rest and distract his mind he had formed the habit of counting the omnibuses he met in the space of three or four hundred yards between his residence in Downing Street and the House of Commons, so as to see whether he could make an average of them, based on a comparison of the number that passed each day.

Habits of Exercise.

Unlike most Englishmen, he cared nothing for any games or for any form of what is called sport. As a youth he used to shoot a little, and on one occasion hurt a finger so badly that it had to be cut off by a country doctor. It was before the days of chloroform, and he described the pain as terrible. Like Sir Robert Peel, he was very sensitive to physical pain. But before he reached middle life he had given up shooting. Nor did he ride. Indeed, his only form of exercise, besides walking, was the felling of trees in his park at Hawarden. This practically restricted him, except when at Hawarden, to intellectual pleasures for recreation. Sometimes, however,

he would play whist or, more frequently, backgammon, a game which makes very slight calls upon memory or reflection.

This wonderful activity of mind did not seem to spring from any sense of haste or pressure to get through one piece of work in order to go on to something else. He was never in a hurry, never seemed anxious, even when the time was short, to finish a job off in an incomplete way in order to despatch the work which remained, but went straight on through everything at the same pace, reminding one of the strong, steady, uniform stroke of the piston of a steam-engine.

Wise Use of Time.

I remember how, having once called on him by appointment at three o'clock in the afternoon, I found him just sitting down to arrange his thoughts for a great speech he had to make the same afternoon at a crisis in the Eastern question. He wished information on a point that happened to be within my knowledge, and besides questioning me very deliberately upon it, talked in a leisurely way on the subject at large as if he had nothing else to do. At five o'clock he rose to deliver one of his longest and finest speeches, which it would have taken most men days to prepare for. However, he never wanted words; all his care was to be sure of the facts and to dispose the matter of a speech in the proper order.

In many people a high sense of the value of time produces unpunctuality, because they desire to crowd more things into the day than the day permits. It was not so with him. He got rapidly through work, not by haste, but by

extreme concentration of his faculties upon it. And as he was never in a hurry, he scarcely ever failed to keep an appointment.

It was not only time that he hated to see squandered. He disliked waste in everything. Any heedless or lax expenditure of public money displeased him, not merely because it increased the burdens of the people, but because it seemed to him stupid and wrong — a sort of offense against reason. He was just as careful about public money as if it came out of his own pocket.

Dislike of Extravagance.

Once in the little garden behind his official residence he lamented that the surface was all gravel, saying that the wife of his predecessor had caused the turf which had formerly been there to be taken away for the sake of her garden parties. When asked why he did not have the turf put back, he answered that it would cost too much. "How much?" He named a sum, which, to the best of my recollection, was less than two hundred dollars, and evidently thought this cost more than he ought to ask the country to bear.

He used to express surprise at the modern English habit of using cabs to go quickly over a short distance in a city, contrasting it with the frugality of his contemporaries in his early days, when vehicles plying for hire were scarce. Such vehicles are comparatively cheap in London, where one can go two miles for a shilling fare— a quarter of a dollar; yet the constant use of them seemed to him a mark of extravagance. His eagerness to keep down the public expenditure was not much appreciated by the people,

for during the last thirty years public opinion in England has become quite careless regarding the raising and spending of revenue.

This dislike of all needless expenditure accorded with the simplicity of his own life. He had an almost puritanical aversion to luxury in dress, in food, in the furniture of a house, in the external paraphernalia of life, and never went beyond the requirements of modest comfort. All his ideals were of the moral sort, all his pleasures of the intellectual sort. Although as a political economist and a financier he rejoiced in the extraordinary growth of wealth in England, he saw with disquiet the habits of luxury and the tendencies of thought and taste which wealth brought with it, and often declared that the humbler classes were far more likely to be right in their political opinions than the rich and great, notwithstanding the advantages which education ought to give the latter.

Political Integrity.

The presence in the legislature of men really indifferent to political issues, but seeking to use their position for the promotion of their private pecuniary objects, filled him with alarm. To most observers it does not seem to be at this moment an actively increasing evil in England. But I recollect that in 1897, after he had retired from public life, he dwelt upon it as the greatest danger that threatened parliamentary institutions. His pride, which was great, showed itself in his high sense of personal honor and dignity, a sense so high as almost to exclude vanity, any manifestation of which he would have thought

beneath him. It never appeared in the intercourse of private life.

No one was more agreeable and easy in conversation. He gave unstintingly the best he had to give, and gave it to all alike, to the person of least as readily as to the person of most consequence. Although he talked copiously and in a somewhat oratorical fashion, with gestures and modulations of voice which reminded one of his speeches, he never tried to absorb the conversation, and was always quick to listen to any one who had some new facts to give, especially if they lay within the lines of his historical and theological interests. His respect for learning was so great that he was sometimes imposed upon by people who professed more than they possessed. Still greater was his respect for the gift of poetical creation.

His Intellectual Tastes.

In a remarkable letter which he wrote after the death of Alfred Tennyson to the poet's eldest son, the present Lord Tennyson, and which is printed in the second edition of the latter's life of his father, he expressed with characteristic force his sense of the superiority of the genius which speaks to all succeeding ages through immortal verse to the talent of the statesman, whose work is done by lower methods and for his own time, and who is soon forgotten. Poetry and philosophy were to him the highest forms of human effort, and philosophy he valued chiefly as the handmaid of theology, taking — so far as his friends could discover — no very great interest in metaphysics proper, but only in such parts of them as could be made to support or

explain morality and religion. His own favorite philosopher was Bishop Butler, in whom he found the union of these elements which he desired.

Toward German metaphysics, and perhaps even toward German literature in general, he betrayed a slight prejudice, which seemed to spring from his dislike of the influence German thought of a skeptical order had exercised in the days of his early manhood.

Italian poets were his favorites, next after Greek and English ones; indeed, he sometimes seemed inclined to put Dante at the head of all poets. How far this was due to his sympathy with Dante's theology it was not easy to determine. He would not have admitted it to be so, although, as every one knows, he tried to discover traces of Christian theology in the mythology of Homer. But he was more influenced by likings and aversions of this kind than he himself realized, being by no means what people call "objective" or detached in his judgments. Moreover, although sincere and earnest in seeking for truth, his mental methods were really more forensic than judicial, and he seldom delivered conclusions which had not been more or less colored by the feelings of sympathy or repulsion which made him unconsciously adopt a view and then find arguments for it.

A Sanguine Leader.

This was in one way an advantage to him in public life. It helped to make him sanguine. When he desired a thing, he found it easy to deem it attainable. Sometimes he erred by underrating the forces opposed to him. But on the

whole he gained by the cheerful eagerness with which he threw himself into enterprises from which less hopeful men recoiled as impracticable. The warmth of his feelings, although it sometimes betrayed him into language of undue vehemence in denouncing what he thought unjust conduct or pernicious principle, did not make him harsh in his judgment of persons or unfair in his treatment of them.

A Keen Judge of Human Nature.

In private he discussed people's character and capacities very freely. Few things were more instructive than to sit beside him and listen to the running commentary which he would make on the speakers in a House of Commons debate, noting the strong and weak points which they showed, and delivering estimates of their respective abilities.

Such estimates were sometimes trenchant in exposing the pretensions of showy men, who imposed on the outside world. But they were hardly ever bitter. Even the antagonists who attacked him with violence or spite, forgetting the respect due to his age and position, did not seem to rouse any personal resentment in his large and charitable mind. Indeed, his friends often thought that he erred on the side of indulgence, and honored by elaborate refutation persons whom he had better have dismissed with a few words of contempt.

I cannot recall a single instance in which he seemed to be actuated by a revengeful wish to punish a person who had assailed or injured him, but I recall many in which he refrained from opportunities others would have used. How far

this was due to indifference, how far to a sense of Christian duty, was a question often discussed by those who watched him. Perhaps it was partly due to his pride, which led him to deem it below his dignity to yield to vulgar passions.

Tranquillity in Great Crises.

One of the strange contrasts which his character presented was that between his excitability on small occasions and his perfect composure on great ones. He would sometimes, in a debate which had arisen suddenly, say imprudent things, owing to the strength of his emotions; would then go beyond what his friends had expected, and give a dangerous opening to his adversaries. At another time, when the crisis was more serious, he would present a perfectly tranquil demeanor, and give no sign, either at the decisive moment or afterward, that he had been holding his feelings in the strictest control, and straining all his powers to go exactly as far as it was safe to go and not an inch farther.

At such times his easy confidence in his own powers was an interesting object of study. Once in his later life when a question of great delicacy and difficulty was coming on in the House of Commons, and everybody expected to see him watchful and alert and perhaps fidgety over it, he deliberately composed himself to sleep on the Treasury bench, and enjoyed a refreshing nap till the time came for him to speak, when with no apparent effort he awoke, delivered a speech in which he said exactly what was needed and not a word more, and sat down, leaving his opponents so puzzled by the safe and guarded generalities in which he had half-expressed and

half-reserved his views that the subject dropped in a short time, because no one could find in his words anything to lay hold of. It was often remarked that the greater the emergency the more composed and the more completely equal to it did he seem.

This was a result of the amazing strength of his will, which enabled him to hold his emotions in check and summon all his intellectual resources into the field whenever he desired to do so. People who noted this strength of will and saw how much he towered over his colleagues assumed that he must be self-willed in the ordinary sense of the word, that is to say, obstinate and overbearing. This was by no means the case. He was very patient in listening to arguments from those who differed from him, and not more difficult to persuade than many people of far less powerful volition.

Yielding to the Majority.

Not a few instances could be given in which he consented to acts which his own judgment disapproved because the majority of his colleagues were inclined the other way; and in most of these instances it is probable that he was right. He used to refer to some of them afterward, freely condemning some of the acts of his own government, but never, so far as I can recollect, taking credit to himself for having counseled the wiser course. He was too proud to indulge in the "I told you so's" of smaller men.

The force of his will showed itself, not in that tyrannical spirit which cannot brook resistance, but in the unconquerable tenacity with which he held his course in the face of obstacles when

he had made up his mind that a thing must at all hazards be attempted. It was a part of his courage, and his courage was magnificent.

His Physical Courage.

Physical fear was unknown to him. At the time when, after the Phœnix Park murders, he was believed to be, and probably really was, in danger of assassination, and shortly afterward, when several attempts to kill people and destroy buildings by dynamite had been made in London, it was thought necessary to guard his person, and the persons of some of his colleagues, by policemen who were charged to follow them about everywhere. This protection was most distasteful to him, and although to please his friends he generally submitted to it, he could not resist the temptation occasionally to escape.

There is a back way out of the House of Commons by which it is possible to get to the Thames Embankment, a wide and lonely thoroughfare bordering the river, the view from which over the river is always striking, and most so just before sunrise when the morning star flames up above St. Paul's Cathedral, and the dawn, brightening over the city, begins to redden the broad stream beneath. By this way he used to pass out late at night, eluding the vigilance of the police, and enjoy a solitary stroll under the stars before returning to his house, indifferent to the dangers which others feared for him.

So, too, on his journeys to and from London, and in his walks round Hawarden, he insisted on reducing the precautions taken to the lowest point that his friends would permit, hating the

idea that any one would attempt to harm him, and having no apprehensions for himself.

The circumstances of his life and career called more frequently for the exercise of moral courage than of physical, nor is there any career in which such courage is more essential either to success or to a man's own inward peace and satisfaction than that of a statesman in a popularly governed country. Whoever enters upon such a career must be prepared to be often misunderstood and still more often misrepresented. He is sure to excite enmities,—and that not only from opponents,—and he will from time to time have to face unpopularity if he obeys his conscience.

The Quality Which He Most Valued.

In an admirable speech delivered in the House of Lords just after Mr. Gladstone's death, Lord Rosebery referred to his frequent use of the word "manly" as indicating the quality which he most valued. It was one which he never failed to practise. He was cautious, carefully examining beforehand the country he was going to traverse. If he thought the risks of failure too great, he might choose some other course. But once he had chosen his course, no threats of opponents, no qualms and tremors of friends could turn him from it.

Difficulties rather stimulated that wonderful reserve of fighting force which he possessed. None of his colleagues ever heard him suggest as a reason for dropping a measure or recoiling from an executive act the personal attacks to which he or they would be exposed. It was a consideration that never crossed his mind, and this became so well known to those who were

around him that they did not think of suggesting it as one which could affect his action. Although, as has been already observed, he was impetuous, and sometimes threw too much passion into a speech when he had become excited, this courage had nothing to do with his impetuosity, and was just as manifest when he was weighing a question in cold blood.

Mr. Gladstone had his deficiencies, and even his faults. No one who knew him need wish to deny them, because his great qualities were far more than sufficient to eclipse them. But I think that those who studied him closely in private as well as in public would have agreed in holding that they were faults rather of intellect than of character, so far as it is possible to distinguish these two things.

His High-Mindedness.

It was, of course, chiefly by his intellectual gifts that he was known and for them that he was admired. Yet that which seemed most worthy of admiration in a man who had seen so much of the world, and might well have been hardened by it, was the freshness and warmth of his feelings and the lofty plane on which his thoughts moved. In discussing a subject with him, one was often struck by the tendency of his mind to become fantastic, to miss the central point of a question, to rely upon a number of fine-drawn and subtle arguments instead of one or two solid ones. But if an appeal was made to his love of humanity and justice and freedom, he never failed to respond.

He hated cruelty. One of the strongest motives he had for taking up the cause of Irish Home

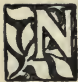
Rule was his horror at the atrocities which had been perpetrated in Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century. He would often speak of them with a sense of shame as well as anger, which made one imagine that he thought some kind of expiation for them required from England. It was the same loathing for cruelty and oppression that made him in 1876–78, and again in his latest years, so ardent an advocate of the cause of the Eastern Christians.

Standard of Personal Honor.

He had a very strong sense of public duty. His standard of personal honor was high in small things as well as in great, and I may illustrate this by saying that, extremely ingenious as he was in debate and extremely anxious to prevail, I cannot recall an instance in which he knowingly misrepresented an adversary's words, or used an argument which he himself knew to be fallacious, although these are the most familiar devices of parliamentary controversy, devices which, censurable as they certainly are, are used by many men deemed fair and trustworthy in the relations of private life.

His view of human nature was always charitable and even indulgent. Sometimes it was too indulgent, yet this is the better side on which to err. The memory of these things, and of his magnanimity and of his courage, abides with those who knew him, and figures more largely in their estimate of his worth and his place in English history than does their admiration for his dazzling intellectual powers and his tireless intellectual energy.

Some Suggestions on Reading.

EVER read a poor book. By a poor book, I mean a weak book, a thin book, a book in which the facts are loosely or inaccurately stated, or are ill-arranged, a book in which the ideas are either vague or commonplace. There are so many good books in the world, and we have so little time for reading them, that it is a pity and a waste of opportunities to spend any of that time on the inferior books, which jostle us at every turn, and often prevent us from noticing the good ones.

Sometimes, of course, it happens that there is no first-rate book on the subject one desires to study, say an out-of-the-way department of history or of science. Then, of course, we must read what we can get, a second- or third-rate book if there is nothing better to be had. But most branches of knowledge have now been dealt with by strong, clear, competent writers; and it is well worth while to take pains to find out who has handled the subject best before one buys, or takes out of a public library, a treatise upon it.

In the higher kinds of literature, such as poetry and philosophy, the maxim that one ought to spend one's time upon the very best is still more true. Whatever else young people read in those pleasant days when the cares of life and the calls of a business or a profession have not yet closed around them, they ought to read, and to learn to love, the masterpieces

of our literature, and especially of our poetry, so that they may, for the rest of their lives, associate these masterpieces with the sweet memories of youth.

If they know enough of Greek or Latin, of Italian or of German, to be able to enjoy the great classical authors who have used those tongues, so much the better. A classic who belongs to another age and country is in some ways even more stimulating and impressive than one who has written in English, or one who has lived near to our own time, because he represents a different circle of ideas and enlarges our notions of human life and thought by describing life and conveying thought in forms remote from our own.

The Value of Foreign Languages.

If you are fortunate enough to know Greek and Latin, read the writers in the original. More than half the charm, and a good deal of the substantial value, is lost in the best translation. It is better to make out the original even slowly and with difficulty than to hurry through it in an English version, although sometimes an English version may be used to help one over the roughest parts of the road.

If you do not know the ancient languages, try to know some modern one; if you have not time for that, give yourself all the more earnestly to some great English writers, and especially to the poets, because they put fine thoughts into the most perfect form, which it is more easy to remember, and which becomes a standard of taste, whereby one may learn to discern the good and the evil in the literature of one's own time.

Those who find that they cannot enjoy poetry must, of course, content themselves with prose; but the best prose will not do as much for mind and taste and style as good poetry does.

Acknowledged Masterpieces.

Some one may say that the advice to read only the strong books and eschew the weak ones is hard to follow, because how is a young man or woman to know from their titles which books are the best in the subject he or she desires to study? This objection does not apply to the masterpieces, for every one agrees that Shakespeare and Milton and Wordsworth and Keats and Bacon and Burke and Scott and Daniel Webster and Macaulay, not to speak of the men of our own time, whose rank has not yet been conclusively settled, have taken their place as great writers whom an educated person ought to know. But I admit that it does apply to the books which any one who is interested in history, or in some branch of natural science, or in social or political or theological inquiries, will desire to peruse.

In these departments of knowledge there are comparatively few books that have reached the rank of classics; and as they are more or less progressive departments of knowledge, the student naturally desires to find a recent book, which will give him the latest results of investigation.

How, then, is he to know the best recent books? He cannot trust advertisements and press notices. He might as well believe an epitaph.

In these circumstances the youth ought to ask

the advice of a person conversant with the subject. If he is or has been a student at a college, let him ask his professor. If he has not that chance, he is almost sure to know some person who can either give him light or get it for him from some other quarter. If, however, he knows no one likely to be able to help him, and applies to a stranger who is a recognized authority on the subject, — enclosing an addressed envelope, so as to give the authority as little trouble as possible,— he is pretty certain to have a friendly and helpful reply. Those who are fond of a subject are almost always willing to help other students less advanced than themselves, if they see reason to believe from the student's letter that he is a *bona fide* applicant, and not merely an autograph-hunter.

The Place of Fiction.

The same principles apply to fiction as to other books. There is plenty of good fiction in the world, and, indeed, in the English language alone; quite enough to occupy so much leisure as fiction may fairly claim; and it is folly to read thin or vapid or extravagant fiction, while leaving the better romances or novels untouched, merely because they are not of our own immediate time.

Happily we have enough good fiction of our own time to enable any one to "keep in touch," as people say, with modern taste, as well as to know the best that the past has given us. By good books of fiction I mean books which enlarge one's knowledge of human nature, either human nature generally or the human nature of some other age and country,—like a vigorous historical

romance, — books which contain impressive pictures of character, or striking dramatic situations, books which sparkle with wit or wisdom, or whose humor sets familiar things in a new light.

We have at least nine English writers some at least of whose works belong to this category — Richardson, Fielding, Miss Austen, Miss Edgeworth, Walter Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, — not to speak of living writers,—while one or more of the tales of Miss Burney, of Fenimore Cooper, of Washington Irving, of Disraeli, of Meadows Taylor, possibly of Bulwer, also, may deserve to be placed in the same category.

If we add foreign novelists whose works have been translated, — for a novel loses far less by translation than a poem, — the list of powerful works of fiction available in our own language might be almost indefinitely increased. Not all these writers can be called classics, but from all of them much may be drawn which an active mind will appropriate and find permanently enjoyable.

Permanence of Impressions.

A second maxim is to try to carry away something from every book you read. If a book is worth reading, it is worth remembering. One cannot remember everything; and to each person the things worth remembering will differ according to his tastes and the amount of insight he brings with him. But every one may carry away something, and may thus feel that the book leaves him to some degree richer than it found him; that it has helped him to add to his stock in trade, so to speak, of facts or of ideas.

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If it has not done this, why should one have spent so much eyesight upon it? Why not have given the time to bicycling or baseball, or have lain down upon the grass and watched white clouds flit across the sky?

How to remember the contents of a good book, or at least the best part of them, is a difficult problem, and one which grows more difficult the older one grows, for the memory is less retentive in middle life than in youth, and the pressure of daily work in a profession or in business tends to clog the free play of intellectual movement in spheres distinct from that work. The most obvious plan is to make notes of the things that strike you most. This involves time and trouble, yet the time and trouble are not lost, for the mere effort of selecting the salient facts, or of putting into a concise form the salient ideas, helps to impress them on the mind, so that they have more chance of being remembered, even should the notes be lost.

If the book belongs to you, it is not a bad device to use the blank sheet or two which one often finds inside the covers for making brief notes, adding references to the pages; or if there are no blank sheets, to paste in two or three and use them for this purpose.

The Value of System.

Methodical habits and no small measure of perseverance are needed for such a system. I have myself tried it only to a very small extent, and have consequently forgotten a great deal I should like to have remembered; but I know those who have steadily worked upon it, and who recommend it warmly. They say, with

truth, that it forces one to think as one goes along, that it keeps the mind active instead of passive, that it helps one to discover whether the author has really anything to say, or is merely putting off one with words.

Then further, it is generally better to read upon some regular lines rather than in a purely desultory fashion. To have a fresh curiosity, alive to all that passes in the world of letters or of science, is no doubt good; but to try to read even the few best books in more than a few branches is out of the question. The field of knowledge has now grown too wide and too much subdivided. For most of us the safer plan is to choose some one, or at most some two or three subjects, and so direct our reading as to concentrate it upon them, and make each book we study help the others, and carry us further forward in the subject.

Know One Subject Well.

To know even one subject pretty thoroughly is a great gain to a man. It gives him something to think about apart from his daily occupations. It forms in him the habit of sound criticism, and enables him, even in subjects with which he has only a speaking acquaintance, to detect imposture, and discover when a writer is really competent.

The suggestion that reading should not be desultory, nor take too wide a range, does not of course mean to exclude poetry and fiction from any one's reading. So little good poetry appears from year to year that the time needed to read it is but small; while fiction is read so rapidly that it does not interfere with the pursuit of any

other regular line of study for which a man may find that he has a taste.

What I wish to dissuade is the notion which some men, and more women, entertain, that it is the duty of a person of cultivation to try to read all, or even a large proportion, of the books of importance, or reputed importance, that are from time to time published on various topics. There is no use trying to do this.

Knowledge at First Hand.

Read the works of the great authors before you read criticisms upon them. Let them make their own simple impression on your mind; and only after they have done so, read what other people have said about them. If the book is sufficiently important, and you have time enough, you can afterward plunge into the comments and criticisms, or may study the life of the author, and see what were the conditions which helped to mold him. But the main thing is to read him in the first instance with your own eyes, and not through some one else's spectacles.

Sometimes it is better not to read much about the personal life of an author. He may have put the best of himself into his books, and the record of his private history may diminish the strength of their impression. There are, of course, some pieces of criticism by eminent writers upon other writers which are themselves masterpieces, and ought to be read by whoever wants to know how to comprehend and judge works of imagination.

Whoever desires to retain through life the habit of reading books and of thinking about them will do well never to intermit that habit,

not even for a few weeks or months. This is a remark abundantly obvious to those whose experience of life has taught them how soon and how completely habit gains command of us. Its force cannot be realized by those who are just beginning life, when an unbounded space of time seems to stretch before us, and we feel a splendid confidence in the power of our will to accomplish all we desire. The critical moment is that at which one enters on a business or a profession, or the time when one marries.

Lifelong Benefits.

Those who are fortunate enough to keep up the practice of reading, outside the range of their occupation, for two or three years after that moment, may well hope to keep it up for the rest of their lives, and thereby not only to sustain their intellectual growth, but to find a resource against the worries and vexations and disappointments which few of us escape. To have some pursuit or taste by turning to which in hours of leisure one can forget the vexations, and give the mind a thorough rest from them, does a great deal to smooth the path of life.

How is a business man, or one engaged in such a profession as law or medicine, to find the time for systematic reading? One way is to spend less time in reading newspapers and periodicals than most people now spend. Newspapers no doubt contain a vast mass of useful information. I have often been astonished at the quantity of readable and instructive matter to be found, for instance, in the Sunday editions of the leading New York and Boston and Chicago daily papers. So there is a vast mass of good

writing in the magazines. The trouble is, to use a familiar phrase, that one cannot possibly remember what one reads in these miscellaneous piles of information, first because one skims through them in a quick, unreflective way; secondly because each article drives the article before it out of one's head.

Careful Discernment.

The use of reading is to be measured not by the number of lines of print over which the eye has travelled, but by the force of the stimulus given to the mind and the amount of knowledge carried away. In the case of the newspaper the stimulus is feeble, because one reads in a light and listless fashion whatever has not a direct business interest, while the information, as already observed, is too large and too multifarious to be retained by the most powerful memory for more than a few hours. It runs out of the mind like water through a sieve.

So one of the most useful habits a young man can form is that of learning rapidly to select and pounce upon those items of news in a paper which are either of great general importance or specially significant to himself, and to let the rest go unread. He will miss some things he might like to have seen, but he will gain far more by having time available for other purposes. The maxim of the famous Roman, that one must be willing to remain in ignorance of some things, seems truer and truer the longer one lives, for experience teaches that it is more profitable to do and to know a few things well than many things badly.

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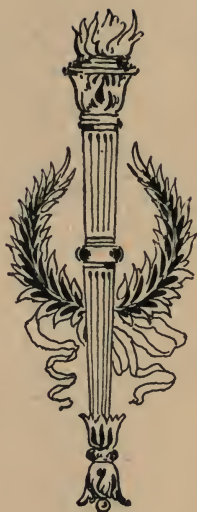

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